

Suburban Leaders who have made a difference: Jose Torres

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By Marco Ortiz

José Torres

This week we are featuring Dr. Jose Torres, the president of Aurora-based Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy. Torres was superintendent of Elgin Area School District U-46 from 2008 to 2014 and has served in various leadership roles, including regional superintendent/area instruction officer in Chicago Public Schools, and as the only superintendent on the Federal Equity and Excellence Commission of the United States Department of Education. Torres was one of three educators nationwide to receive the 2014 Dr. Effie H. Jones Humanitarian Award from the AASA, the school superintendents association.

P. ¿Cuál cree que ha sido su contribución más importante a la comunidad latina suburbana en los últimos 25 años?

Q. What do you think has been your most important contribution to the Suburban Latino community in the last 25 years?

Torres: I would like to think that my most important contribution to our community has been my service to all as Superintendent of Elgin School District U-46 over six years between 2008 through 2014. As the first Latino to lead the largest school district in Illinois outside of Chicago with 40,000 students, 5,000 employees, and almost a \$500 Million dollar budget, I believe that I made a difference in many lives. In this leadership role, I led a great team of people in expanding early childhood opportunities, mobilizing our community agencies to support early childhood, expanded college level classes for all students (Advanced Placement classes), created a richer curriculum in middle schools by adding Spanish and pre-engineering classes, offered Project Lead the Way (pre-engineering) in all high schools, and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) a pre-college class in all middle and high schools. I'm particularly proud of leading the transformation of all of our bilingual programs from a subtractive to additive program; being recognized for having a Dual Language school district. Other accomplishments include giving over 80 \$1,000 dollar scholarships to students who were the first in their families to go to college, creating an administrator training program for U-46 teachers, expanding gifted programs for all, and overseeing the end of a federal law suit brought against the school district. Now as President of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA), I serve as Chief Executive Officer over the world's leading teaching and learning laboratory for imagination and inquiry, whose mission is to ignite and nurture creative, ethical, scientific minds that advance the human condition, through a system distinguished by profound questions, collaborative relationships, personalized experiential learning, global networking, generative use of technology and pioneering outreach.

Q. What motivated you to make a difference in your community?

Torres: I have always believed that education is the way out of poverty. I'm motivated by serving all in my community and serving in some small way as a role model for others who aspire to leadership and service.

Q. What tips would you share with any Latino wanting to make a difference in our community?

Torres: I would recommend that those who want to make a difference work hard, serve, and always remember their roots. The opportunities that we have today were won by people who went before us. Similarly, we can open doors of opportunities for those who follow us. Finally, we can accomplish a lot if we don't care who gets the credit.

Q. What obstacles did you face to be a Latino leader in your community?

Torres: I believe that obstacles are put in our way to assess or test our determination. What's important is not the obstacle, but our determination to succeed. "Sí se puede" has always been a motivating phrase in my personal life. Early in my childhood, my mom made my brother and I memorize the following sentence attributed to Napoleon Hill, "What the mind of man can conceive and believe, the mind of man can achieve."

Q. How have you seen the evolution of the suburban Latino community in the last 25 years?

Torres: I have had the pleasure of being in the suburban community only since 2008. Over the past seven years, I have seen a growth in business ownership, political power, and educational attainment. I encourage our Latino Community to continue to make progress in these very important areas of our society.